

2006 MEFIRS ANNUAL REPORT

THE OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL DIVISIONS

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is Maine's leading fire investigation, prevention, fire research, and fire and life safety education and awareness organization. All activities of the Fire Marshal's Office are driven by an assessment of Maine's unique fire burden. Understanding the many direct and indirect social and economic costs of fire and the cost to benefits ratio of particular fire suppression, mitigation, law enforcement, and regulatory practices employed by Maine's fire service is a central concern of the Fire Marshal. The data from that assessment provides the basis from which the Fire Marshal directs all legislative, rule making, public education/awareness, and policy initiatives. The assessment is based upon nationally and internationally recognized methods of fire research and data analysis. The Fire Marshal's Office now assesses Maine's fire burden annually.

Investigations Division

The Fire Marshal has three investigative offices with a total complement of 13 sworn officers located in the northern, central and southern regions of Maine. Investigators determine the cause and origin of all fires causing death and injury, suspicious fires and explosions, and pursue criminal investigative activities in addition to providing training to municipal fire investigation officers. Fire investigators work closely with the Portland office of ATF and the two agencies investigate many fires and explosions jointly.

Northern Investigations Office Located in Bangor under the supervision of Sgt. Tim York, these officers investigate fires in Aroostook, Piscataquis, Washington, Hancock, Waldo and Penobscot counties.

Central Investigations Office Located in Augusta under the supervision of Sgt. Ken Grimes, these officers investigate fires in Somerset, Kennebec, Lincoln, Knox, Sagadahoc, Waldo and Hancock counties.

Southern Investigations Office Located in Portland under the supervision of Sgt. Joel Davis, these officers investigate fires in York, Oxford, Androscoggin, Franklin, and Cumberland counties.

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Fire Prevention Division

This division is located in Augusta under the supervision of Nelson Collins, Fire Inspectors conduct inspections of public assemblies in addition to DHHS, DOC and other government licensed occupancies for compliance with fire safety and life safety codes as well as federal ADA regulations. The Inspections Unit conducts inspections of these facilities throughout the State of Maine and provides training to constituencies managing facilities that house vulnerable populations.

Construction Plans Review Located in Augusta under the supervision of Nelson Collins, the Plans Review Unit identifies and provides consultation to correct life safety issues and fire hazards in all public assemblies and DHHS, DOC and other government licensed occupancies. All major construction projects in Maine must be reviewed by the Fire Marshal's Office for life safety, fire sprinkler and code compliance and the value of that construction has increased substantially in the past year. The value of major new construction projects during the one year period November 2005 to October 2006 was \$1,042,853,287 compared to \$786,775,783 for the previous 12 month period. Those construction plans reviews include businesses as well as day care facilities, schools, assisted living and numerous other public buildings. Plans are reviewed out of this office for construction in all 16 counties.

Engineering and Sprinkler Plans Review Our office carries out several safety agendas under Eric Ellis who is a licensed Fire Protection Engineer. His predominant responsibility is the regulation of the fire sprinkler industry, with its nearly 300 licensees and the review of over 700 fire sprinkler system plan submittals annually. He also typically does field inspections for 20 to 25% of these to verify that standards are maintained and to solve technical installation issues. Statistical analysis summaries of industry trends are provided to the licensed industry, as is education and training.

In addition, Eric is our AutoCAD expert, dealing with computer-aided design projects plus those plan submittals that are done electronically.

It is this area of our office that pioneers the full capabilities of the electronic tools that are available to us, in order to maximize our efficiency so that services to the public can be expanded and enriched. Examples include: online services for license renewals and permit submittals complete with the ability to make payments electronically; developing a scanning & electronic storage/ retrieval system for blueprints; maintaining regular communication with the licensed industry through “weekly” group emails; and establishing a website with links and regularly-updated databases and reference resources. The latest project, now in its completion, has been to develop & test tools & procedures to do the majority of this work long-term from out-of-state so that services remain uninterrupted when staff is temporarily away, such as for training.

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With a licensed Professional Engineer as part of our team, we have an in-house contact person for researching code issues that involve either multiple and/or unfamiliar codes, complex mathematical studies such as fire dynamics or fire protection system problems, and for evaluating various types of technical reports. Questions of an engineering nature are funneled to this part of our office. The various constituent groups are pleased to have such professional expertise so readily available.

Research

The research staff is located in Augusta under the supervision of Assistant Fire Marshal Joseph Thomas. The research unit collects data on fire incidents from Maine's Fire Departments through the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System (MEFIRS) for annual reporting. That information is made available to local decision makers in reviewing fire department response times, fire incident types, causes and strategies. Specialized topical research on various elements of Maine's fire burden such as fire fatalities, injuries, trends and the economics of fire is designed, implemented and modeled for statistical analysis by the Senior Research and Planning Analyst, Richard Taylor. The specialized research is shared with constituencies throughout Maine in an effort to augment fire prevention and safety.

In 2006 the research unit completed a comprehensive analysis of fire fatality in Maine from 1983 to 1992 as part of a two part series. Part two, 1993 to present has been designed and files from 1993 to present are being reviewed at this time. The research staff has also begun to work closely with Maine's Center's for Disease Control, hospitals, and fire registries to collect and monitor fire related injuries in Maine.

With a Fire Prevention and Training Grant received through the Department of Homeland Security, the Fire Marshal's Office conducted a needs assesement to begin constructing a database from which to create GIS mapping capabilities. It has been determined that the primary need is to access the MEFIRS data and use this data in training personnel in the Fire Marshal's Office to create dbf (database files) that can be used to create the maps using the ARCMAP/ARCInfo program. This process is under way at the present time. The first maps generated have provided intriguing information about fire incidents as well as the MEFIRS Incident Reporting System. The use of this visual technology will continue to be developed through 2007 with mapping being featured in the State Fire Marshal's Office Newsletter and other documents used to develop various policy and program initiatives.

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Public Education/Awareness and Special Projects

Florian Hall, opened in late 2005, continues to be used by Maine's fire service community for fire codes and standards training, seminars, specialized informational activities focused on pipeline security, sprinkler and smoke detection systems, injury prevention, and other special events.

The Fire Marshal hosted *play safe! be safe!* the largest public awareness program focused on juvenile firesetting in Maine fire service history: The program was teleconferenced from Augusta to locations in Portland, Presque Isle, and Bangor.

The Fire Marshal's Office also received a Fire Protection and Safety grant to address Maine's comparably high rate of fire fatality among senior citizens in addition to fire injuries among all vulnerable populations. The office will collaborate with the Office of Elder Services, Maine's Area Agencies on Aging, and TRIAD to develop educational programming for seniors using the hazard house model. The grant will also further the Fire Marshal's effort to incorporate Geographic Information Systems technology into the Fire Burden Assessment.

Maine Fire Marshal News, a quarterly newsletter continues to be distributed to a growing number of interests in both the public and private sectors. The newsletter began in 2006.

A State of Maine Juvenile Fire Safety and Intervention Protocol has been drafted to address a disturbing trend in juvenile fire activities.

Children Are No Match For Fire, a book authored by Carol Dean, is being distributed to all elementary schools in Maine that have a pre-k and kindergarten program. Inspectors are distributing the books to the schools in an effort to promote fire safety at a young age.